



# NEGRO FOLK-SONGS: SPIRITUALS...

NATALIE CURTIS BURLIN



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# Negro Folk-songs: Spirituals...

Natalie Curtis Burlin

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HAMPTON SERIES

NEGRO FOLK-SONGS



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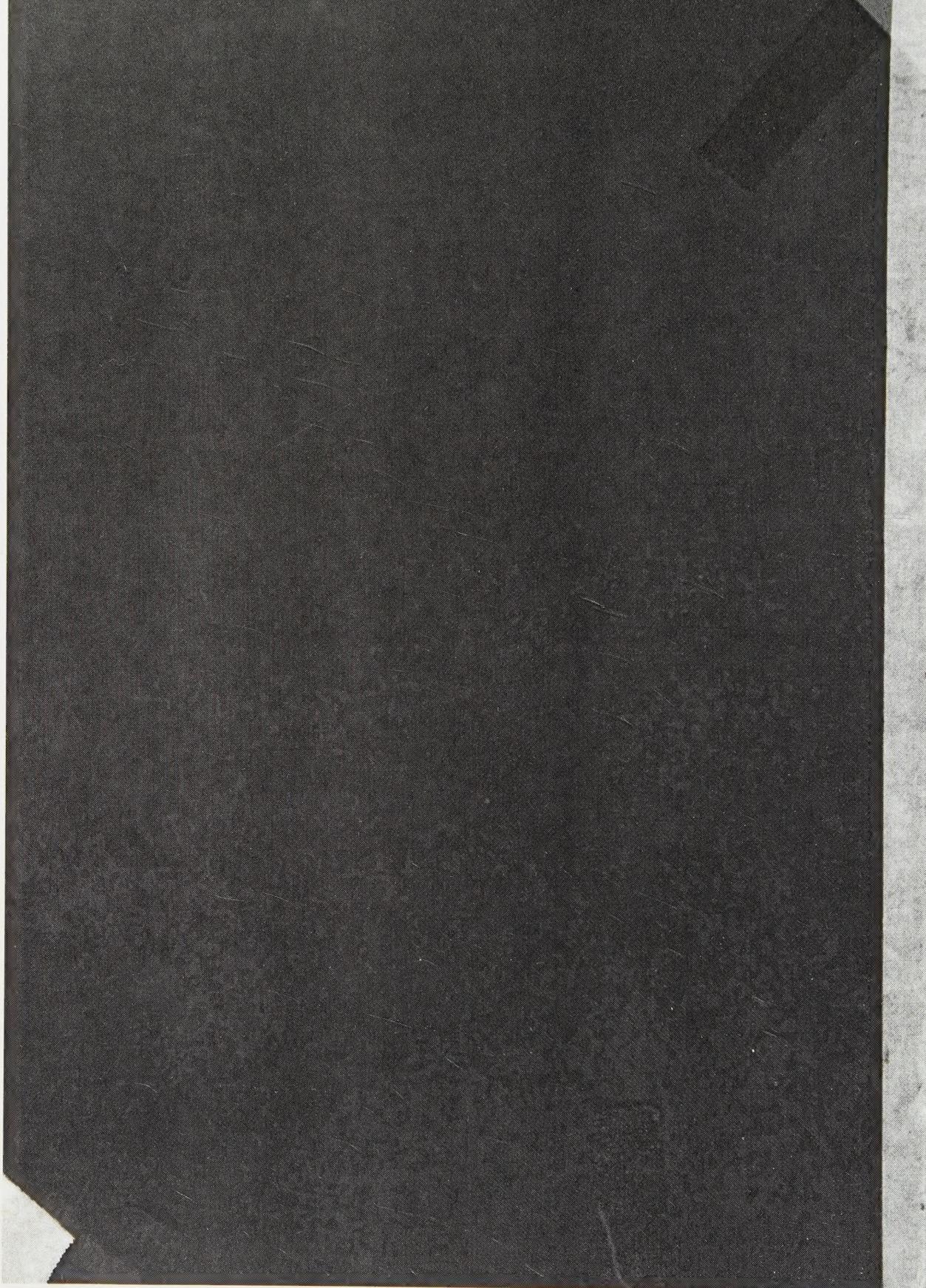
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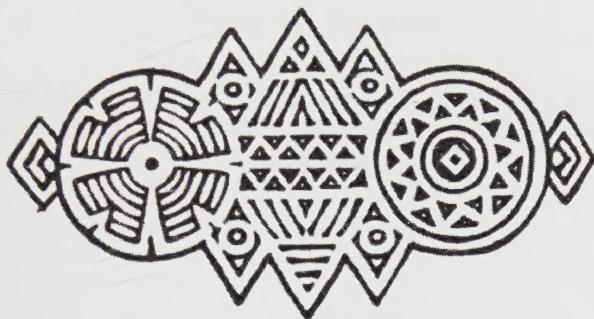




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## HAMPTON SERIES

# NEGRO FOLK-SONGS



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## NATALIE CURTIS BURLIN

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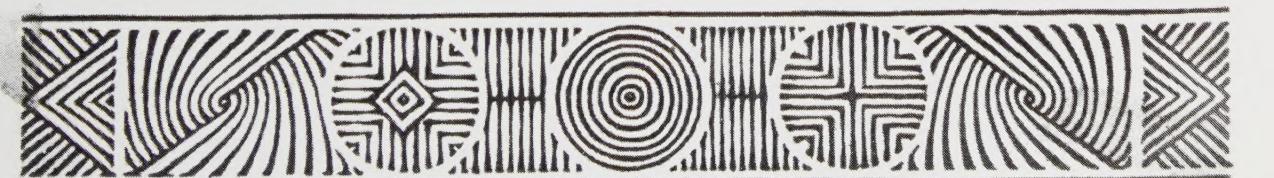
*Spirituals*

*Books III-IV*

*Work- and Play-Songs*

Price, each, 50 cents, net

New York . G. SCHIRMER . Boston



NOTE: All royalties from the sale of this book go to Hampton for the benefit of Negro education.

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To  
CORA M. FOLSOM

Friend of Negroes and Indians

Student of folk-lore and guardian of the folk-lore spirit at Hampton  
These recordings of Work- and Play-Songs are affectionately  
Dedicated.



## FOREWORD

"Who trains the chorus? It is marvelous!"

The question was eagerly put by a young German musician who was visiting the Hampton Institute in Virginia and for the first time heard the great chorus of nine hundred colored students sing the "Plantations," as the Negroes call the old melodies that had their birth in days of slavery—religious songs that were the voice of the bondman's soul. From a technical as well as purely musical standpoint the extraordinary unity, the precision in "attack" and the faultless pitch of the Negro singers impelled the musician's query.

And my answer baffled him: "Why, no one trains these Negro boys and girls, their singing is natural."

"I don't mean," he persisted, "who trains their voices (of course, I understand that these are natural voices), but who teaches them their parts: soprano, alto, tenor, bass—who drills them as a chorus?"

"No one."

He stared at me incredulously. But I assured him that these black singers made up the "parts" themselves extemporaneously and sang together with the same spontaneity of unity that individuals feel when gathering with a group—they fall in line, and keep step as they walk. This quick contagion of musical sympathy, this instant amalgamation of the personal musical consciousness into a strong mass-feeling—this it is that would make any perfunctory "chorus-drilling" certain death to the inspirational spirit of those superbly simple old Negro songs.

But the musician would not believe that such results could be achieved by instinct alone. And so I finally referred him to "Major" Moton, now Booker Washington's successor as principal at Tuskegee, who was at that time commandant at Hampton, and sang the solo parts—the "Lead" (leader), in Negro musical parlance. His reply emphasized through its laughing surprise the inborn, intuitive quality of the Negro's love for music:

"Why, nobody ever taught us to sing!"

"Well then, how do you do it?" asked the musician in amazement.

"I don't know. We just sing—that's all!"

Surely a people who can "just sing" in extemporaneous four- and six- and eight-part harmonies are gifted not only with rare melodic and rhythmic sense, but also with a natural talent for harmony that distinguishes the black race as among the most musically endowed of peoples.

The nine hundred boys and girls at Hampton whose chorus singing is so "marvelous" are not divided and seated according to "parts" like the usual white chorus. Indeed, technically speaking, this is no "chorus" at all—only a group of students at the Hampton Institute who sing because music is a part of their very souls. And so in chapel, where the old "plantations" are sung, the boys sit together at the sides, and the girls sit together in the middle, each singing any part that happens to lie easily within the range of his or her voice, harmonizing the slave-songs as they sing. A first alto may be wedged between two sopranos with a second alto directly in front of her. A boy

singing high tenor may have a second tenor on one side of him and a second bass on the other. But the wonderful inspirational singing of this great choir is sustained without a flaw or a single deviation in pitch through song after song, absolutely without accompaniment.

"How do they do it?" One may well ask! For the singing is not only faultless in its simple and natural beauty, but profoundly stirring in its emotional wealth of feeling. Few listeners can withhold a catch in the throat when, after the final benediction in chapel, a deep silence which seems to hover like a benediction itself over those hundreds of bowed heads, is broken by a soft-breathed note of music, almost inaudible at first, like hushed wings, like the descent of the Holy Spirit. And then, still breathed rather than sung, gathering in volume as group after group catches it up, from those bent black heads rises a chanted "Amen" of such penetrating sweetness, such prayerful intensity, that—well, every white person that I have ever seen visit Hampton for the first time leaves chapel wiping his eyes!

"Only in Russia," declared one musician, "have I heard chorus singing comparable to this." Indeed, in my opinion, at Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes, Fisk, and other Southern schools, are to be found the great folk-choruses of America.

Through the Negro this country is vocal with a folk-music intimate, complete and beautiful. Not that this is our only folk-lore, for the song of the American Indian is a unique contribution to the music of the world; also our Anglo-Saxon progenitors brought with them the songs and ballads of the British Isles, still held in purity in the mountain fastnesses of the Southern States, though strange versions of them crop up in the cowboy songs of the frontier. But it is the Negro music with its by-product of "Ragtime" that to-day most widely influences the popular song-life of America, and Negro rhythms have indeed captivated the world at large.<sup>1</sup> Nor may we foretell the impress that the voice of the slave will leave upon the Art of the country—a poetic justice, this! For the Negro, everywhere discriminated against, segregated and shunned, mobbed and murdered—he it is whose melodies are on all our lips, and whose rhythms impel our marching feet in a "war for democracy." The irresistible music that wells up from this sunny and unresentful people is hummed and whistled, danced to and marched to, laughed over and wept over, by high and low and rich and poor throughout the land. The downtrodden black man whose patient religious faith has kept his heart still unembittered, is fast becoming the singing voice of all America. And in his song we hear a prophecy of the dignity and worth of Negro genius.

NOTE.—This collection of Negro Folk-Songs consists of four books, each containing songs for male quartet. As the books will appear separately in serial publication, the descriptive notes are arranged in such a way as to make each volume independent of the other. Any slight repetition of facts will, therefore, be understood.

<sup>1</sup> Some have denied that our popular American music of to-day owes its stimulus to the Negro. A most interesting and conclusive account of the evolution of "Ragtime" is contained in the "Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man" by James Weldon Johnson, published by Sherman French & Co., Boston. "Ragtime" is not unjustly condemned by many for the vulgarity of its first associations, a vulgarity that cannot be too deeply deplored, but which is fortunately fast slipping out of the march and dance songs of to-day. Yet this first association can not annihilate the interest of the Negro rhythmic form from which sprang "Ragtime," for this form has intrinsic character. Though now widely copied and almost mechanically manufactured by commercial white song-writers of cheap and "catchy" music, the extraordinary syncopation of ragtime, which makes the rhythm so compelling, is undoubtedly Negro and of real value and interest musically. Nor is this rhythmic peculiarity confined, with the Negro, to popular and secular music only. Lifted into noble breadth of accent, syncopation is found in the old Spirituals, or prayer-songs, for it is the rhythm natural to the Negro: intensely racial, its counterpart may be found in the native African songs from the Dark Continent. See Foreword to "Negro Folk-Songs," Book II, this series, page 5.

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## COTTON IN SONG

*Give us, oh, give us, the man who sings at his work! Be his occupation what it may, he is equal to any of those who follow the same pursuit in silent sullenness. He does more in the same time—he will do it better—he will persevere longer.*

CARLYLE.

Song lightens labor all over the world, and in no country more so, perhaps, than in Africa, where music is a part of the very life of the natives, in whom the sense of rhythm is so highly developed that to rhythimize toil, through the regular cadences of chanted song, is to make it at once more natural as well as more effective. Many are the work-songs of the American Negro in the United States, songs improvised or made up on the spot to fit the task, and songs traditional. So well recognized is the fact that the Negro labors best when he labors with song, that in old days a man who could lead the singing of a gang of workmen was well worth extra pay. This impulse in the Negro to sing at work is inborn; it is a racial trait common to his African forebears. With us Anglo-Saxons, song as a labor invigorator seems to have died away with the invention of machinery, although our parents still remember the "chanty-man" of the merchant sailing vessels whose voice led those lays and ballads which helped to weigh anchor and to hoist, lower or furl the sails. The human instinct which takes the scattered movements of a group at labor and unifies them into a concerted, rhythmic expression, making them one in song, is in itself an art instinct, and in this primitive kind of art the African is a master. Is it not, after all, a most vital and priceless thing, this art which is part of a man's own pulse-beats, his own muscle, his own will? What a contrast to the silent, deadening toil of the modern factory.

We in the United States should be thankful that Hampton Institute has done so much to preserve in living form the old songs of the Negro. Founded in Virginia, in 1868, by General Samuel Chapman Armstrong,<sup>1</sup> Hampton has been the pioneer industrial school for the training of backward races. But though it has taught Negroes and Indians to plow and plant in the white man's way, to support themselves by trades and to meet the economic conditions of the modern world, Hampton has not failed to recognize that the dark-skinned peoples have gifts of their own. More than that, the primitive races—child-races, clasping the mother-hand of Nature—still have a vigorous gladness in life itself and in the proud strength of the human body; while we, already weary in our maturity, feel little but the strain of forced marching on the road to progress, and the fever for the goal. Sophisticated creatures of a complex culture, do we not indeed need the nature-people to call us back to that youth of natural poetry and song wherein work is vitalized by the free play of the imaginative spirit? Believing in the ethnic value of the black men and the red, Hampton has urged her pupils to bring to the school their own folk-lore and music. The saving of this inheritance has been a glorious task, for the dynamic force of the old songs has charged the life of the students with an impetus of true continuity in that the racial Past, with what it held of dignity and worth, beauty and inspiration, has been lovingly gathered up to be carried on into the new day.

<sup>1</sup> See pages 3 and 7, Book I of this series.

All three of the Cotton-Songs in this collection are sung at Hampton. The first two were discovered by Miss Cora M. Folsom, who since 1880 has practically devoted her life to the school and has been one of its strongest influences for the encouragement of folk-song. But for her awakening touch these quaint and humorous work-songs, already beginning to grow dim in the background of the students' memory, would have died out and been lost. Miss Folsom now has charge of the school-museum which contains a truly unusual collection of African and other curios, and it was in the large exhibition hall, with its balcony over the water, that the colored students gathered around her in the long evenings of a Southern summer to sing these songs for my recording pencil. They danced, they talked, laughed, explained and illustrated, all with an enthusiasm and an unconsciousness that showed the sympathy of their relation to their white-haired friend. On me, these evenings made a never to be forgotten impression—the soft twilight, the stillness over the lawns that sloped to the water's edge, and the voices of these young men of to-day who sang the songs of their fathers' yesterdays against the background of a far distant African past.

\* See Cott'n-Dance Song, page 18.

## COTT'N-PICKIN' SONG

Recorded from the singing of

|                |            |               |
|----------------|------------|---------------|
| Ira Godwin     | ("Lead")   | Agriculture   |
| Joseph Barnes  | (Tenor)    | Tinsmith      |
| William Cooper | (Baritone) | Schoolteacher |
| Timothy Carper | (Bass)     | Bricklayer    |

This song was brought to Hampton from Florida by a boy named Hill, who had worked on the plantations with the old people among whom the songs of the cottonfield were traditional. His voice was like a reed-pipe, with the old-time break and quaver in it that is so pastoral in suggestiveness, the mere tones calling up the rural South to the memory of one who has seen it, more intimately than could a visual picture. The wide plantations under the hot sun, the tall rows of cotton-plants, the bending Negroes, with here and there a wide-brimmed battered straw hat shading the face of some old man, the black and white contrast of the fluffy cotton bolls and the dark hands and arms—all this one sees with the first bars of the old song whose clear, pentatonic refrain "Cott'n want a-pickin'" carols against its musical background of elemental harmonies like the chirping iteration of a bird-note rising from among the cotton-stalks.

This is indeed a characteristically rustic song, the primitive five-tone scale being clear-cut throughout, even in all the many verses whose delicately marked variants never venture far from the original simple outline, though molded into delightful little rhythmic contrasts by their play around different words.

No one knows how old the song may be, but it would seem to have sprung into life shortly after the Emancipation, for it begins with no less an event than the reading of the proclamation of freedom to the slaves. (And what a picture the simple verse gives in a few words!)

The Negro now labors as a freedman "in er contract," or for a share of the cotton crop. How the black man sometimes fared in this transaction is both humorously and pathetically shown in the verse where "Uncle Billy" comes out of the cotton-sale with no share at all, "Boss" declaring that the Negro in weeding had chopped his own half of the cotton "out wid de grass." Of course, the newly freed ex-slave, without property or education, is in debt—probably to Boss, who perhaps has seen to that and to the payment of those debts "wid cotton," so that Uncle Billy does "well" when, after all his labor in the sun, he has a few cotton seeds to sell, the product of which brings him the "red han'cher you see 'roun' ma neck"! But with characteristic optimism and good will the old Negro tells Boss that he will "try hit once mo'," and the cherry, sweet, monotonous music of his toil is again heard in the cottonfield.

The dialect in these verses from the furthermost South differs slightly from well-known speech-forms common in more Northern States, and adds to the quaintness and picturesqueness of this song of the Florida plantations.

## COTT'N-PICKIN' SONG

*Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Gwine clean all ober dis farm.*

One twenties<sup>1</sup> of May mo'nin'  
Under dat barnyard tree,  
Dem Yankees read dem papers  
An' sot dem darkies free.

*Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Gwine clean all ober dis farm.*

I's been workin' in er contract  
Eber since dat day,  
An' jes' found out dis yur<sup>2</sup>  
Why hit<sup>3</sup> didn't pay.

*Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Gwine clean all ober dis farm.*

When Boss sol' dat cott'n  
I ask fo' ma half.  
He tol' me I chopped out  
Ma half wid de grass.

NOTE:—Some singers omit the word "gwine" from the last line of the chorus.

<sup>1</sup> Twentieth. <sup>2</sup> Year. <sup>3</sup> It.

Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
    Gwine clean all ober dis farm.

Boss said, "Uncle Billy,  
I t'ink you done well  
To pay yo' debts wid cott'n,  
An' have yo' seeds to sell."

Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
    Gwine clean all ober dis farm.

I sol' dem seeds  
Fer five cents er peck,  
An' bought dis red han' cher'  
You see 'roun' ma neck.

Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
    so bad,  
    Gwine clean all ober dis farm.

I tol' Boss dis yur  
I'd try hit once mo';<sup>2</sup>  
He counted off dis cott'n,  
Took ev'ry oxner<sup>1</sup> row.

Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Gwine clean all ober dis farm.

Us plant dis cott'n in Aprul,  
Us lay hit by-a in June,  
Us had a hot dry summer,  
Dat's why hit open so soon.

Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,

Gwine clean all ober dis farm.

Hurry up, chillun,  
Us ought ter been gone;  
Dis wezzer<sup>1</sup> looks so cloudy  
I t'ink hit's gwine ter storm.

Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,

Gwine clean all ober dis farm.

Boy, stop goosin'<sup>2</sup> dat cott'n  
An' take better care!  
Make-a haste, you lazy rascul,  
An' bring dat row from dere!

Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,  
Dis cott'n want a-pickin'  
so bad,

Gwine clean all ober dis farm.

<sup>1</sup> Weather.

<sup>2</sup> "Goosin'" cotton is to pick so carelessly that some of the cotton is left on the bolls.

I  
Cott'n-Pickin' Song  
(From Florida)Price  
50 cents net

Recorded

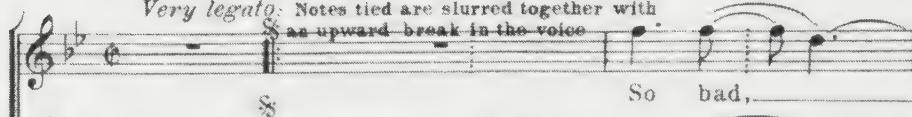
and transcribed by  
Natalie Curtis Burlin

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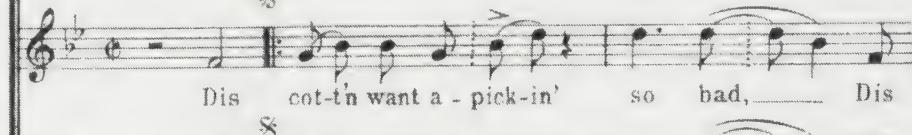
In very moderate time, with swinging rhythm

Very legato. Notes tied are slurred together with

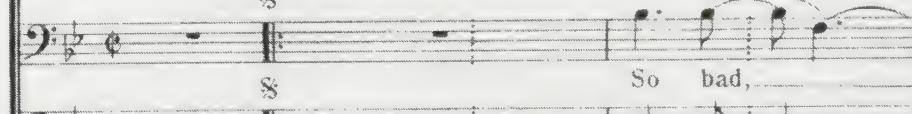
Tenor



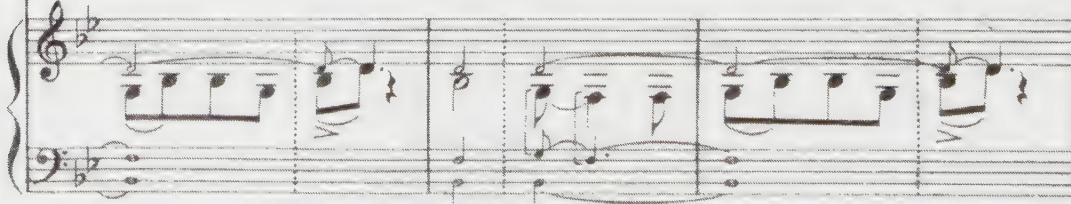
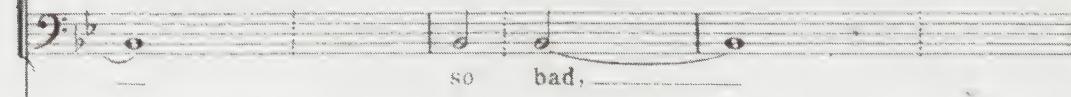
Lead \*



Baritone



Bass

Piano  
(only for  
rehearsal)

*Note.* The Hampton Quartet usually sing only the last three verses of this song.

\* The voice of the "Lead" or leader carries the melody and is printed in the piano-part in large type. It should sound well above the other voices.

so bad, Gwine clean all o - berdis farm.

so bad, Gwine clean all o - berdis farm. Dis cott'n wanta - pickin'

so bad, Gwine clean all o - berdis farm.

So bad, so bad,

so bad, Dis cott'n want a - pick-in' so bad, Dis

So bad, so bad,

So bad, so bad,

so bad, — Gwineclean all o - berdis farm.  
1st verse  
SOLO

cott'n want a - pickin' so bad, — Gwineclean all o - berdis farm. One

so bad, — Gwineclean all o - berdis farm.

so bad, — Gwineclean all o - berdis farm.

twentis\* of — May mo'n - in', Under dat barn-yard tree, — Dem

Yan-kees read — dem pa - pers, An' set dem dark - ies free. Dis

2d verse  
SOLO

— I's been work - in' in er con-tract Eb-er since dat day, — An'

CHORUS D.S.

jes' found out — dis yur\*\* Why hit\*\*\* did-n't pay. Dis

\* Twentieth. \*\* Year. \*\*\* It.

## 3d verse

SOLO

When Boss sol' dat cot-t'n, I ask fo' ma half; He

CHORUS D.S.

tol' me I chopped out Ma half wid de grass. Dis

## 4th verse

SOLO

Boss said, "Un - cle Bil - ly, I fink you done well To

CHORUS D.S.

pay yo' debts wid cot - t'n An' have yo' seeds to sell. Dis

## 5th verse

SOLO

I so...ol' dem see. ee.eeds Fer five cents er peck, An'

CHORUS D.S.

bought dis red han - cher\* You see roun' ma neck. Dis

## 6th verse

SOLO

I tol' Boss dis yur I'd try hit once mo;\*\* He

CHORUS D.S.

counted off dis cot - t'n Took ev -'ry oz - zer\*\*\* row. Dis

\* Handkerchief. \*\* More. \*\*\* Other.

## 7th verse

SOLO

Us plant dis cot - t'n in A - prul, Us  
 lay hit by - a in June, Us had a hot, dry  
 sum - mer: Dat's why hit o - pen so - soon. Dis

CHORUS D.S.

Hur - ry up, chil - lun, Us ought ter been gone, Dis  
 wez - zer\* looks so cloud - y, I t'ink hit's gwine ter storm. Dis

## 8th verse

SOLO

Boy, stop goos - in'\* dat cot - t'n, An'  
 take bet - ter care; Make a haste, you la - - zy  
 ras - cul, An' bring dat row from dere! Dis

CHORUS D.S.

Hur - ry up, chil - lun, Us ought ter been gone, Dis  
 wez - zer\* looks so cloud - y, I t'ink hit's gwine ter storm. Dis

## 9th verse

SOLO

Boy, stop goos - in'\* dat cot - t'n, An'  
 take bet - ter care; Make a haste, you la - - zy  
 ras - cul, An' bring dat row from dere! Dis

CHORUS D.S.

Hur - ry up, chil - lun, Us ought ter been gone, Dis  
 wez - zer\* looks so cloud - y, I t'ink hit's gwine ter storm. Dis

\* Weather.

\*\* "Goosing" cotton, is to pick so carelessly that some of the cotton is left in the bolls.

## COTT'N-DANCE SONG

Recorded from the singing of

|                |            |               |
|----------------|------------|---------------|
| Ira Godwin     | (“Lead”)   | Agriculture   |
| Joseph Barnes  | (Tenor)    | Tinamith      |
| William Cooper | (Baritone) | Schoolteacher |
| Timothy Carper | (Bass)     | Bricklayer    |

At Hampton this song is often sung as a companion to the Cott'n-Pickin' Song, following as a spirited climax; for the songs seem to belong together, having been brought from Florida by the same boy<sup>1</sup> of whose life and work in the far South they had formed a part.

The cotton picked, it was hauled to the scales and weighed. Then, to celebrate the end of the labor, the Negroes broke into a jubilant dance, throwing themselves into the sport with the same exuberance and freshness as the tireless native runners and burden carriers of Africa, who at the end of the day dance with a violence that attests to the tremendous physical endurance of the black race. The cotton-pickers, amid shouts and laughter, formed a rough circle with the dancer in the middle. Then a dance-song rose from lusty throats while the encircling singers and onlookers beat a sharp rhythmic accompaniment by stamping their feet, clapping their hands and patting their knees.

Anyone who wanted to dance leaped into the open space in the centre of the circle; then when a dancer tired he fell back and joined the outer ring, where he pounded and clapped and sang with the rest.

This dance-song with its five-tone scale is probably still sung in the Florida cotton-fields, though it reaches back to the days of slavery. It is of course typical of the Negro in America, yet if one has studied African folk-lore and music one may easily trace its remote ancestry to the Dark Continent. For the dance, of which this song is the Europeanized melodic life, is plainly a transplanted and adapted version of the informal social dances of savage Africa, with their rapid intricate pattering dance-step and their rhythmic accompaniment in which the whole human body seems to take syncopated part.

The words are spontaneous echoes of labor in the cottonfields. Any number of verses were made up on the moment to keep the song going as long as the zeal for dancing should last. The whole character of the dance was simply an impulsive overflow of high spirits. Anyone could make up a song, anyone could start in to dance, anyone could prolong the dance by composing a new line or a fresh verse. What charm lies in the infectious gaiety and sweeping rhythm of such an irrepressible outburst in music!

The verses are full of typical local allusions, so condensed as to be mere symbols of the meaning which is perfectly understood by the groups of humanity whose life and thoughts the song reflects—a trait common to

<sup>1</sup> See Cott'n-Pickin' Song, page 10.

much primitive poetry among many races. The song begins with "Massa's"<sup>1</sup> emphatic commands: "O Massa said from firs' to las'." The next lines epitomize the work of the cottonfields, for after the seed is planted in rows about three feet apart, each plant comes up as two little leaves; then the man or woman must take a hoe and weed out all but "two stalks" which must be about "eighteen inches an' a half" apart. Also the weeding must include "all de grass"; Massa is very positive about this. (It will be remembered how in the previous song Boss denies Uncle Billy a share of the cotton picked by saying that the old Negro had "chopped out" his half "wid de grass"—the black man's half being evidently the tiny worthless plants that had to be thrown away anyhow.<sup>2</sup>) On poor land the two little stalks are left nearer together, since the soil will not give them enough nourishment to grow and spread as far as "eighteen inches an' a half"; so that Massa's commands imply good land.<sup>3</sup>

As the song progresses and the random verses are flung out, one seems to see and hear the whole life of the cottonfield—the wail of a baby stung by a cotton-fly; the blinding sun that makes the toiler defend present laziness by the promise to "pick a hundred by an' by"; the race between the cotton-pickers for the wager of a "'tater-pie," which adds zest and merriment to the labor; finally, the picture of the cotton-pickers themselves in their "duckin' breeches an' baggin' sacks," for every item of their apparel is described. Perhaps, when the cotton is picked and hauled and the labor is over, comes the vision of a gift of new clothes from Massa!<sup>4</sup>

"Dem duckin' breeches" are breeches of duck or ducking, usually grayish in color and very strong of wear, sometimes shot with a narrow "pin-stripe." "Baggin' sacks" are the pouches or "sacks" made of bagging and worn at the side to hold the cotton as it is picked. "Red ripper" is a red ribbon—probably a neck-tie; the shoes and hat must "match" only because they must rhyme with "sacks!" Such a song is never a conscious composition—the lines are shouted out as they come into the singers' heads. Meanings really matter little so long as the rhythm and swing and feeling for rhyme are there. There is a child-like charm in the naïveté with which assonance takes the place of rhyme in such words as "last," "half," "grass" and "task," and further on in "sacks," "match" and "back." And, whether intentional or not (perhaps one line was forgotten by the Florida boy or his associates?), the emphasis of the last two lines, identically the same, is most effective in celebrating the climax of the song—the prospect of a feast of "'possum."

<sup>1</sup> Master. <sup>2</sup> See page 10.

<sup>3</sup> For help in the explanation of this song, I am indebted to the colored students, and to Miss Folson of Hampton, the original collector of these Negro verses.

<sup>4</sup> See "Peanut-Pickin' Song," Book IV of this series, where Massa rewards his slaves with new clothes.

## COTT'N-DANCE SONG

(From Slavery Times)

Florida

O Massa said from firs' to las',  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Eighteen inches an' a half,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Two stalks an' all de grass,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
So much a day—dat's yo' task,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
I t'ought I heard dat baby cry,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Hit may be stung by a cotton-fly  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
De hotter de sun de redder ma eye,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
I'll pick a hundred by an' by.  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Jim he bet me a 'tater pie,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Dat he could pick more cott'n dan I.  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
I straddle dat row an' hit did fly,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
I win dat pie an' didn't half try.  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
I ben' ma head down to dat groun',  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Didn't look up till I made dat roun'.  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Den dat sun was almos' down  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Jim didn't had but fifty poun'.  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Dis cott'n so rank and den so tall,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
'T won't be open all by fall.  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Den we pick hit an' dat'll be all,  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Den how we gwine ter get it haul?  
'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'

Dem duckin' breeches and baggin' sacks,  
    'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Red ripper, shoes, and hats to match,  
    'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Big lezzer<sup>1</sup> straps across de back,  
    'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
Dat strongly helt dem baggin' sacks.  
    'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
De possums den in de cott'n pile,  
    'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'  
De possums den in de cott'n pile,  
    'Way down—in de cott'n-fiel'.

<sup>1</sup> Leather

# Cott'n-Dance Song

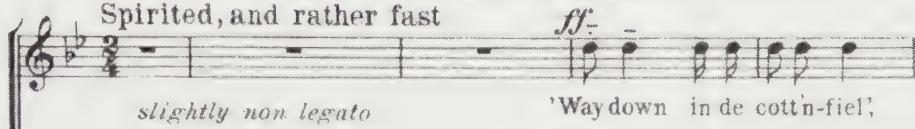
Dating from the time of slavery  
(From Florida)

Very rhythmically but with much abandon

Spirited, and rather fast

*ff*

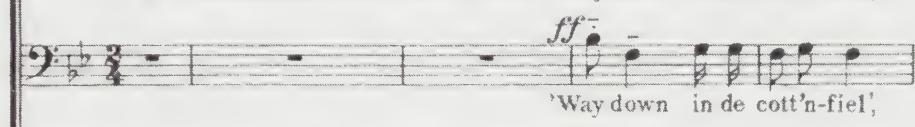
Tenor



Lead \*



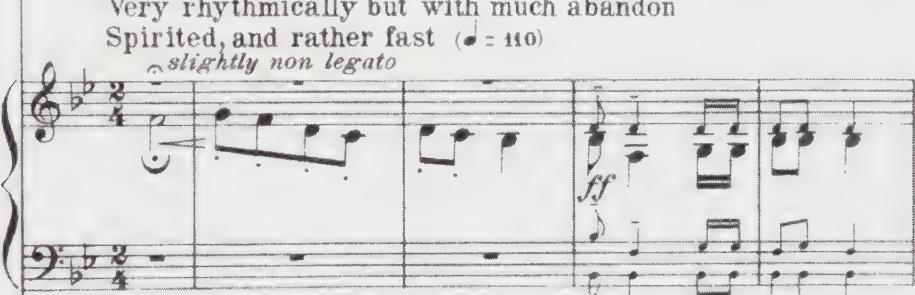
Baritone



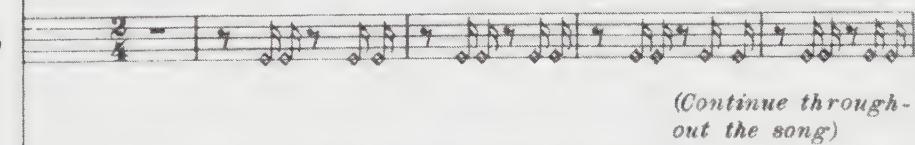
Bass



Piano  
(only for  
rehearsal)



Hand-clap



Hand-clap



Foot-stamp



\* The voice of the "Lead" or leader carries the melody and is printed in the piano-part in large type. It must sound well above the other voices.

*always slightly non legato*

*ff*

'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel',

Eighteen inches an' a half, 'Way down in de cot-t'n- Two stalks an'

*ff*

'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel',

*ff*

'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel',

*always slightly non legato*

Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel',

all de grass, Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel', So much a day, an' dat's yo' task,

Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel',

Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel',

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

\* Though the chorus is usually sung *ff*, the dynamics may be altered to give variety.

ff.

'Way down in de cot-t'n fiel'. 'Way down in de

'Way down in de cot-t'n - I t'ought I heard dat baby cry, 'Way down in de

'Way down in de cot-t'n fiel'. 'Way down in de

'Way down in de cot-t'n fiel'. 'Way down in de

cot-t'n-fiel'. 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel'.

cot-t'n-fiel', Hit\* may be stung by a cot-t'n fly, 'Way down in de cot-t'n - De

cot-t'n-fiel'. 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel'.

cot-t'n-fiel', 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel'.

\* "Hit" is "it," in Florida dialect.

(CHORUS)

hot-ter de sun de red-der ma eye, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel'

(CHORUS)

I'll pick a hun-dred by an' by, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-

(CHORUS)

Jim he bet me a 'ta-ter pie, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel', Dat

(CHORUS)

he could pick more cot-t'n dan I, 'Way down in de cot-t'n - I

(CHORUS)

straddle dat row an' hit did fly, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel', I

(CHORUS)

win dat pie an' did-n't half try, 'Way down in de cot-t'n - I

(CHORUS with each repetition)

ben' ma head down to dat groun', 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel'

Did-n't look up till I made dat roun', 'Way down in de cot-t'n -

Den dat sun was al-mos'down, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel'

Jim did-n't had but fif-ty poun', 'Way down in de cot-t'n - Dis

cot-t'n so rank an' den so tall, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel',  
 'Twon't be o - pen all by fall, 'Way down in de cot-t'n -  
 Den we pick hit an' dat 'll be all, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel. Den  
 how we gwine ter git hit haul? 'Way down in de cot-t'n - Dem  
 duck-in' breeches an' bag-gin' sacks, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel,  
 Red ripper, shoes an' hats to match, 'Way down in de cot-t'n -  
 Big lez-zer straps a - cross de back, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel', Dat  
 strong - ly helt dem bag-gin' sacks, 'Way down in de cot-t'n - De  
 pos-sums den in de cot-t'n pile, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel', De  
 pos-sums den in de cot-t'n pile, 'Way down in de cot-t'n-fiel'.

\* The song increases in speed towards the end. \*\* Ribbon.

\*\*\* After the chorus, these last words may be repeated spoken, or rather shouted, with slow emphasis. Gay yells follow the ending of the song.

# COTT'N-PACKIN' SONG

*Recorded from the singing of*

JAMES E. SCOTT

From Georgia comes this chant of the black laborers at the docks, brought to Hampton by a young Negro, James Scott, now in the United States Army.<sup>1</sup>

In old times the City of Savannah was a great place for the shipping of cotton, and the wharves hummed and rattled as the wheeled hand-trucks, heaped with cotton-bales, were whirled by running Negroes to the side of the vessels. Then a derrick from the ship let down a great hook and hoisted a bale on which knelt a Negro to balance the load. Up went the hook, while cotton and Negro moved slowly through the air; then down through the open hatch into the hold the bale was lowered, to be seized by the waiting packers and stowed away while the hook swung up and out again with the dangling Negro clinging to it. Bale after bale with its human ballast was thus lifted and dropped.

The black packers in the hold, in gangs of from five to ten men, stowed the cotton by means of iron "screws" which squeezed the bales tightly and compactly into the smallest possible space. Each gang was directed by a "header," or head-man, for the labor required precision and skill as well as strength.

To the Negro, to work in unison means to sing; so as the men strained at their task, a laboring chant arose whose fine-toned phrases were regularly cut by a sharp high cry, "*heh!*", which emphasized the powerful twisting of the screws by the rhythmic muscular movement of the singers. Verses without number were made up, and many were the cotton-packing chants of which the one here recorded is a typical example. Though a song of such rudimentary simplicity as this—mere vocalized rhythm—is often intoned in unison without harmony, yet sometimes a singer, musically inclined, would strike in with a tenor or bass part of his own, or add a little embellishing melodic curve to the block-like crudity of the phrases.

Thus the voices of the cotton-packers, embodying as a part of their song the creak of the derrick and the turn of the screw, molded the monotonous toil into a form of rhythmic life. And cotton itself, a product of labor under a hot sun and so vital to the economic existence of the Southern States, owes how much to the brawn and blood of the patient Negro—yes, from the planting of the first "eighteen inches an' a half"<sup>2</sup> to the picking of the bolls and the final packing of the bales.

<sup>1</sup> James Scott, the singer of this song, is now First Lieutenant in the famous Negro regiment "The Buffaloes" (367th Infantry). At this writing he is reported to have been severely wounded in action.

<sup>2</sup> See Cott'n-Dance Song, page 16.

## COTT'N-PACKIN' SONG

(From Georgia)

Screw dis cott'n,  
                          heh/  
Screw dis cott'n,  
                          heh/  
Screw dis cott'n,  
                          heh/  
                          Screw it tight—  
  heh/

Screw dis cott'n,  
                          heh/  
Screw dis cott'n,  
                          heh/  
Screw dis cott'n,  
                          heh/  
                          heh/  
                          Wid all yo' might—  
  heh/

Here we come, boyz,  
                          heh/  
Here we come, boyz,  
                          heh/  
Here we come, boyz,  
                          heh/  
                          Do it right—  
  heh/

Don't get tired,<sup>1</sup>  
                          heh/  
Don't get tired,  
                          heh/  
Don't get tired,  
                          heh/  
                          Time ain't long—  
  heh/

Keep on workin',  
                          heh/  
Keep on workin',  
                          heh/  
Keep on workin',  
                          heh/  
                          Sing dis song—  
  heh/

<sup>1</sup> Presumed in two syllables: "de-yard."

(These last two verses are modern)

Pay-day here, boys,  
*heh!*

Pay-day here, boys,  
*heh!*

Pay-day here, boys,  
*heh!*

I hear dem say—

*heh!*

We'll have money,  
*heh!*

We'll have money,  
*heh!*

We'll have money  
*heh!*

Dis yere day—

*heh!*

## Cott'n-Packin' Song

(From Savannah, Georgia)

As brought to Hampton and sung by James Scott

Absolutely rhythmic and rather slow,  
with regular and monotonous emphasis ( $\text{♩} = 76$ )

*Voices in Unison*

*legato*

Screw dis cot-t'n!(heh!) Screw dis cot-t'n!(heh!) Screw dis cot-t'n!(heh!)

Screw it tight! (heh!)

Screw dis cot-t'n! (heh!) Screw dis cot - t'n! (heh!) Screw dis cot - t'n! (heh!)

Wid all yo' might! (heh!)

Here we come, boys,(heh!) Here we come, boys,(heh!) Here we come, boys,(heh!)

Do it right! (heh!)

Don't get ti - red, (heh!) Don't get ti - red, (heh!) Don't get ti - red, (heh!)

Time ain't long; (heh!)

Keep \*\*\* work-in', (heh!) Keep on work-in', (heh!) Keep on work-in', (heh!)

Sing dis song. (heh!)

\* This sound is a sharp, rather aspirant ejaculation, accompanying the rhythmic turning of the screw in packing the cotton. It has no pitch.

\*\* Pronounced "Ti-yerd." \*\*\* "On" pronounced with a long o, "ōn" or "ohn."

Modern verses, and fresh extempora - neous verses, are added by the Negroes in singing this song *ad infinitum*.

## CORN-SHUCKIN' SONG

Recorded from the singing of

Goodwin, Barnes, Cooper, Carper, Lancaster, Scott, and other Hampton boys who gathered together in an improvised chorus to join in the refrain of this old song.

This vigorous and spirited chant is said to have come originally from Alabama. A description of the old corn-shucking "bees" at which this was sung, is best expressed in the words of the late Booker T. Washington, of whose youth such songs formed a part.

*(QUOTE FROM  
Booker T.  
Washington)*

"The simple, natural joy of the Negro in little things converted every change in the dull routine of his life into an event. Hog-killing time was an annual festival, and the corn-shucking was a joyous event which the whites and blacks, in their respective ways, took part in, and enjoyed. These corn-shucking bees, or whatever they may be called, took place during the last of November or the first half of December. They were a sort of prelude to the festivities of the Christmas season. Usually they were held upon one of the larger or wealthier plantations.

"After all the corn had been gathered, thousands of bushels, sometimes, it would be piled up in the shape of a mound, often to the height of fifty or sixty feet. Invitations would be sent around by the master himself to the neighbor-planters, inviting their slaves on a certain night to attend. In response to these invitations, as many as one or two hundred men, women and children would come together.

"When all were assembled around the pile of corn, some one individual, who had already gained a reputation as a leader of singing, would climb on top of the mound and begin at once, in clear loud tones, a solo—a song of the corn-shucking season—a kind of singing which I am sorry to say has very largely passed from memory and practice. After leading off in this way, in clear, distinct tones, the chorus at the base of the mound would join in, some hundred voices strong. The words, which were largely improvised, were very simple and suited to the occasion, and more often than not they had the flavor of camp-meeting rather than any more secular proceeding. Such singing I have never heard on any other occasion."<sup>1</sup>

The pride with which "Mazza's niggers" are described as "shining like a beaver hat" makes one think that to the Negro in this country, as to the African on the Dark Continent, a shining skin was a thing of beauty. My Zulu informant<sup>2</sup> told me that the black youths of South Africa often carried a little carved flask (a gourd, or a wooden box) filled with butter from their herds—for Zulus are great herdsmen and their wealth is counted in cattle. Part of the toilet of these youths, superb in the bodily beauty of height, poise and physical development, consisted in rubbing this butter into their skins till their bare black limbs shone like polished ebony. "And then," said the Zulu, "when the sun's rays fell on them, they were beautiful indeed." What a

<sup>1</sup> From "The Story of the Negro." Booker T. Washington; Vol. I, Page 132. (Doubleday, Page & Co., 1909.)

<sup>2</sup> See "Africa-Songs from the Dark Continent," by Natalie Curtis Berlin. (In press with Doubleday, Page & Co.)

wealth of plastic material these magnificent burnished forms would offer to a modern sculptor! The shining skin suggests, too, the smooth, polished surfaces of African wood-carving, proving how primitive art, tho' so seldom literal in representation, yet invariably *expresses the life of which it is a part*. Thus in songs of work and play—a musical form of decoration and design—the American Negro, like his African ancestor, enriches daily existence with a humble beauty of his own creating.

### CORN-SHUCKIN' SONG

Come out hyah an' shuck dis co'n,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!  
Come out hyah an' shuck dis co'n,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!

Bigges' pile seen sence I was bo'n,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!  
Bigges' pile seen sence I was bo'n,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!

Massa's niggers am slick an' fat,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!  
Shine jes' like a beaver hat,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!

Jones's niggers am lean an' po',  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!  
Don' know ef dey git enough to eat o' no,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!

In this corn-shucking song as quoted by Booker T. Washington,<sup>1</sup> the first verse is treated as a refrain, repeated throughout the song. This form resembles that of the Spirituals, whose structure consists in what the colored people call "Chorus and Verses."<sup>2</sup>

#### *Refrain*

Turn out here and shuck dis corn,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!  
Biggest pile o' corn seen since I was born,  
    Oh! Oh! Oh!

<sup>1</sup> "The Story of the Negro," by Booker T. Washington; Vol. I, page 168. (Doubleday, Page & Co., 1909.)

<sup>2</sup> See Forewords to Books I and II of this series.

I.

Massa's niggers am big and fat,

*Oh! Oh! Oh!*

Shine just like a new beaver hat,

*Oh! Oh! Oh!*

*(Refrain.)*

II.

Jones's niggers am lean and po',

*Oh! Oh! Oh!*

Don't know whether they get enough to eat or no,

*Oh! Oh! Oh!*

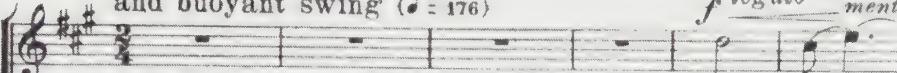
*(Refrain.)*

## Corn-Shuckin' Song

(From Virginia)

Fast: with marked accents  
and buoyant swing ( $\text{♩} = 176$ )

\*\*\*\* *f* *legato* *portamento*

**Tenor** 

*Very loud: shouted  
non legato*

**Lead \*** 

*\*\* Come out hyah an' shuck dis co'n! Oh! oh!*

**Baritone** 

*Oh! oh!*

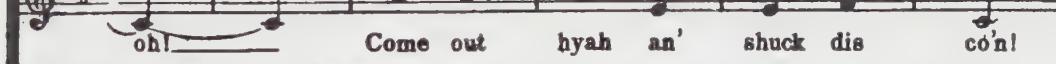
**Bass** 

*Fast: with marked accents  
and buoyant swing ( $\text{♩} = 176$ )*

**Piano  
(only for rehearsal)** 

*oh!* 

*ff* 

*Come out hyah an' shuck dis co'n!* 

*oh!* 

*oh!* 

*ff* 

\* The voice of the "Lead," or leader carries the melody and is printed in the piano-part in large type. It must sound well above the other voices.

\*\* Some singers say "Turn out!" \*\*\* Here.

\*\*\*\* The three ejaculative "Oh!" throughout this song are sung so legato that they are blended into one long sound, almost as tho' the singers sang "Oh - wo - wo!"

*f legato*

Oh! oh! oh!

*f legato* (shouted) *ff*

Oh! oh! oh! Bigges'pile seen sence I was bo'n,

*f legato*

Oh! oh! oh!

*f legato* \*\*

Oh! oh! oh!

*f* \* *ff*

Oh! oh! oh! Bigges'pile seen sence I was bo'n.

*f*

Oh! oh! oh!

*f*

Oh! oh! oh!

*f* *ff*

Oh! oh! oh!

\* *Ossia:*

\*\* Here the bass really sings "Oh - wo-ho - wo!"

*f legato* >

Oh! oh!— oh!— *non legato*

*f legato* >

Oh! oh!— oh!— Mas - sa's nig - gers am

*f legato* >

Oh! oh!— oh!—

*f legato* >

Oh! oh!— oh!—

*f*

*ff*

Oh! oh!— oh!

slick an fat, Oh! oh!— oh!

*ff*

Oh! oh!— oh!

*ff*

Oh! oh!— oh!

*ff*

*ff legato* >

Oh! oh!—

Shine 'jes like a bea - ver hat. Oh! oh!—

Oh! oh!—

*ff* >

Oh! oh!—

oh!—

*legato*

oh!— Jones - es nig - gers am lean an' po',

oh!—

oh!—

*p* > *p*

Oh! oh! oh! *legato*

Oh! oh! oh! Don' know ef dey get enough t' eat o'

Oh! oh! oh!

Oh! oh! oh!

*legato*

Oh! oh! oh! *f rit.* *very broad* oh! oh! oh! oh!

no. Oh! oh! oh! *f rit.* oh! oh! oh! oh!

Oh! oh! oh! *f rit.* oh! oh! oh! oh!

Oh! oh! oh! *f rit.* oh! oh! oh! oh!

Oh! oh! oh! *f rit.*

Another version of the song gives a somewhat different rhythmic value of the notes of the refrain, as follows:

Come out hyah an' shuck dis co'n! Oh!

— *ff* —  
oh! —  
oh! —

— *ff* —  
oh! —  
oh! Come out hyah an' shuck dis

— *ff* —  
oh! —  
oh! —

— *ff* —  
oh! —  
oh! —

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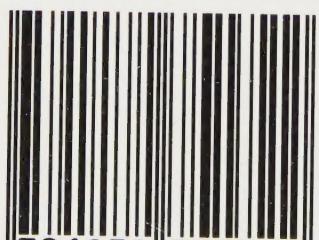
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